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ABSTRACT

A pilot study for a large scale survey and case study to be conducted in the Chicago, Illinois area asked experienced teachers their perceptions of the process of teacher induction in their districts and ways to improve it. Twenty-six New Jersey elementary school teachers responded to an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Most of the respondents agreed that the assignment of a mentor or support teacher was a major priority. In response to the question of a first priority for orienting new teachers, a majority of the experienced teachers felt that helping beginners with classroom management and discipline was the first priority. This was followed closely by explaining the school curriculum, especially in the instructional programs in reading and mathematics. The need for some formal training for mentor teachers emerged as an important conclusion. (JD)

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# TEACHER INDUCTION: A SURVEY OF EXPERIENCED TEACHERS

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# TEACHER INDUCTION: A SURVEY OF EXPERIENCED TEACHERS

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The purpose of this study was to ask experienced teachers for their suggestions about the role of a support teacher in a teacher induction program. Preliminary results suggest that experienced teachers oftentimes act the role of the support teacher without any administrative action. Follow-up interviews with the respondents revealed a willingness to participate as professional support personnel in local district teacher induction programs

Educational researchers (Brooks, 1987) have referred to the period of transition for beginning teachers as a period of induction. The induction of new teachers into the profession has been a topic of discussion for many years; yet the induction phase has only recently begun to be the topic of several educational agencies (Huling-Austin, 1987). A review of the literature identifies contributions from teacher educators, first year teachers, school administrators and experienced teachers. These authors offer adivce, recollections, personal opinion and descriptions of induction programs by means of surveys, experimental studies, qualitative research and program evaluation. Even with these available resources, there is little understanding of why beginning teachers have the experiences they do and of the effects of induction programs (Johnston, 1987).

Numerous educational organizations including local school districts, universities, regional educational service agencies and state departments of education are designing and implementing teacher induction programs in schools. These programs follow various schedules and formats but all have as their major goal to offer assistance to new teachers. In providing a structured plan for new teachers to realize their potentialities, the educational community regards induction as the first stage in teacher development.

One goal of teacher induction programs is to offer instructional and interpersonal support thus fostering both professional development and retention as a teacher. Mentoring is a popular means to deliver an induction program.

Experienced teachers serve as mentors or advocates for the novice teachers. Research has emphasized the success of the mentor/novice relationship. Hoffman and others (1986) identified the peer teacher as a key feature of induction programs. In Georgia, a novice teacher who was paired with a buddy teacher was more successful than one who did not receive such support (Tanner & Ebers, 1985). Schlechty (1985) stated that effective induction systems relied greatly on intensive clinical supervision, demonstration, coaching and constant corrective feedback by real practitioners in real situations. The mentor teacher role is the most suitable means to offer the practical and psychological endorsement novice teachers need. Because the assignment of a mentor teacher is highly regarded in any induction program, the present study was designed to determine what experienced teachers can suggest about establishing a teacher induction program at the local level.

The present study is a pilot for a large scale survey and a case study to be conducted in the Chicago, Illinois area. As previously stated, the purpose for the pilot was to ask experienced teachers their perceptions of the process of teacher induction in their districts and ways to improve it. (See Figure 1.) Because it is an effective measure of the respondents' perspectives, an open-ended questionnaire was the technique used to survey the teachers (Guthrie & Hall, 1984). Although the questionnaires were distributed in both Illinois and New Jersey, only the results from the New Jersey site are included in this report. Among the limitations of the Illinois survey were a small number of returned questionnaires, the absence of additional interviews by the researcher and the lack of familiarity of the researcher with the respondents. This combination of factors is typical rather than exceptional in the first stages of a major research project. As a result, the researchers have spent a considerable amount of time designing the appropriate research methodology for the remaining portion of the project.

A K-5 elementary school in a New Jersey state-designated urban school district was the site for the pilot. The district is comprised of four elementary schools, a middle school and a high school. The survey was distributed during a regularly scheduled after school faculty meeting to the entire staff near the end of the academic year. By documenting their responses during semi-structured interviews, the researcher attempted to reveal the teachers' understanding of teacher induction.

Because of a former professional affiliation with the interviewees, the researcher was considered a colleague. Throughout the data gathering stage, the researcher and respondents were at ease and information was explored in detail. This professional link was a true asset in response clarification during the interviews. The twenty-six respondents included classroom teachers from grades K-5, basic skills teachers, special education teachers, a media specialist, an art teacher and a school nurse. The range of years of teaching experience was one to twenty-seven with the mean of fifteen years.

TEACHER INDUCTION SURVEY

Position:

Total number of years teaching:

1. What kinds of support should be offered to the new-returning teacher?
2. Should mentors be an integral part of a teacher induction program? Explain.
3. Upon being hired into a school district, what do you think the #1 priority to orientate new employees should be?

Figure 1.

These experienced teachers support the research findings that beginning teachers are not ready to be full-fledged teachers regardless of their teacher education program. In answering the first question about the kinds of support given to new teachers, most respondents agreed that the assignment of a mentor or support teacher was a major priority. Specifically, the teachers recommend that teachers at the same grade level assist the new teacher with words of encouragement and a friendly smile. Similarly, support from the local school administration was the second most common response.

When asked whether mentors should be a part of a teacher induction program, 96% of the respondents agreed. In an effort to eliminate reality shock, these teachers explained that it is easier "to learn from someone who knows the ropes." A mentor can help both new teachers and their students to get a smooth start rather than "to sink or swim." The respondents believe that an on-going relationship with a peer is effective in eliminating the loneliness often felt

by the new teacher. According to their comments, the respondents have occasionally performed the role of mentor during their careers.

The final question asked of these experienced teachers is especially relevant to the development of a teacher induction program at the local level. Because success is the goal of a teacher induction program the respondents were asked to describe their #1 priority to orientate new employees into the local school district. This question corresponds to the issue of the content of teacher induction sessions which is paramount to program designers. For the majority, classroom management and discipline were at the top of the list. Explanations of the school curriculum especially the instructional programs in reading and mathematics were also considered primary topics. An interesting concept that was noted by more than a few respondents was the opportunity for novice teachers to observe instruction prior to their teaching assignments in order to familiarize them with the school population. In answering this question, more than one third of the teachers identified the importance of a support person to the novice teacher. Generally, these experienced professionals recognize the significance of mentoring throughout the development of a beginning teacher. The interviewees stated that they regularly assist beginning teachers as friendly critics with corrective feedback as well as ideas and advice. They revealed a willingness to participate as advisors who can furnish the day-to-day assistance that is central to novice teachers.

An analysis of the progress of teacher induction programs reveals that the implementation of a mentor teacher program is conditional. Only brief and superficial training generally is available to the experienced teacher who serves as advocate. This low level intervention strategy rarely capitalized on the research and theory from organizational psychology. For induction programs to succeed, systematic intensive supervision is foremost for beginning teachers. A mentor role requires the ability to demonstrate, to observe and to coach. To assume that minimally trained classroom teachers can serve as supervisors is unreasonable. The content of training for support teachers should include the literature pertaining to teacher development, new teacher needs and concerns, effective teaching, supervision, induction and adult professional development (Odell, 1987).

Even though limited in scope, the results of this survey reinforce the importance for development of local level teacher induction programs and to include the function of staff development in such programs. As a pilot, this study allowed the researchers to enter the world of the individual school. For the case study, research includes weekly interviews and classroom observations in a single school where 75% of the teaching staff is new to the profession. This qualitative data will be analyzed and synthesized as part of an effort to design an effective teacher induction program.

Education, as a profession, should recognize its own importance. By establishing continual professional development similar to management development programs in the private sector, education will attract qualified and enthusiastic persons who will not become disenchanted during their first years in the profession. Continued involvement by all strengthens the individual as well as the profession.

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